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Existing off the map: reading Stein and Barnes as hybrid architects

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	4
CHAPTER 3. DRAFTING A WHOLE SELF IN STEIN'S <i>THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ALICE B. TOKLAS</i>	16
CHAPTER 4. HYBRID IMPOSSIBILITIES IN BARNES'S <i>NIGHTWOOD</i>	36
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION	53
WORKS CITED	55

Abstract

Countless scholarly works have been devoted to the modernist movement and, more specifically, to Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*. The notion of hybridity, however, has remained largely absent from published works about these texts. This project seeks to uncover hybrid elements from these two texts as well as determine some of the implications of their hybridity. I begin the analysis by exploring the links between Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*. Together these three writers' theories offer a working definition of hybridity as a move or a strategy that seeks to create habitable spaces where boundaries of right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable, are pushed aside. Tracing this overarching stance on hybridity through the *Autobiography* and *Nightwood* unveils hybrid texts drafted through the use of gender play, the refusal of compulsory heterosexuality, and literary innovation. From this stance, the *Autobiography* and *Nightwood* have renewed power to change literary history as well as the future, literary or otherwise.

Chapter One: Introduction

From the early 1900s to the 1940s, a flood of artists congregated in Paris. Collectively, their movement represented a significant contribution, if not the foundation, of literary and artistic modernism. The society that was created was diverse, representing a collection of multiple talents, identities, and cultures. Shari Benstock, in *Women of the Left Bank*, notes that these artists did not attempt to fully integrate into French society.¹ The artists congregated to be a part of the community itself, not to be a part of French culture. In *Les Exilés de Montparnasse*, Jean-Paul Caracalla further highlights the separation: “[p]ainters, writers, but also foreign tourists of a more modest category ... these Americans ignored, for the most part, our language. They represented a captive and alluring clientele for their doctors, dentists, exchange agents, bankers, lawyers, real-estate agents—freshly disembarked from across the Atlantic to offer their services to their compatriots” (23).² For Parisians, this movement represented in no small way the birth of a separate world within their city—America had come to Paris.

Two of these American artists, Gertrude Stein and Djuna Barnes, not only lived within this diverse community but also left vivid records of life within it in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Nightwood*, respectively. Despite both books taking place largely within the Parisian expatriate community, the settings couldn’t be more

¹ Gertrude Stein made note of this in *Paris France*. When describing what made French culture so valuable, she notes that, “[t]heir tradition kept them from changing and yet they naturally saw things as they were, and accepted life as it is, and mixed things up without any reason at the same time. Foreigners were not romantic to them, they were just facts, nothing was sentimental they were just there, and strangely enough it did not make them make the art and literature of the twentieth century but it made them be the inevitable background for it” (17).

² My translation.

different. One takes place in a bright environment where the proverbial walls are painted with young genius, flamboyance, and the excited exploration of life. The other takes place in a grotesque underworld where the reader occupies the role of voyeur looking in on things normally swept under the rug. Despite these differences, however, these two texts have similarities—they often explore contradictions: strange pairings of writing styles, characterizations, and ways of being that seem held together in a relationship that stands against the forces of society. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, for example, characterizes Gertrude Stein as a woman who confounds the norms of society in both her physical performance and her sexuality. In *Nightwood*, we see a cast of characters exploring the night to illuminate the day. While these worlds are certainly different, the juxtapositions are parallel. For Stein and Barnes, these contradictions and juxtapositions are vital elements of documenting and fictionalizing the creative scene in Paris. The end results, much like in the real-life creative scene, are lives and even worlds set apart from the conventional possibilities of the day. These hybrid existences—created in habitable nooks carved into one society, sprinkled liberally with elements of the home culture—acted as voices pushing the boundaries of what was normal and acceptable, laying the foundations, unconscious but nevertheless evident, of what would later become contemporary feminist theory.

Chapter Two of this thesis turns to contemporary feminist theory, exploring Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*. The relationships between these three theories provide the framework through which Chapter Three's analysis of Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and Chapter Four's study of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* unveil hybrid constructions.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

Three theorists provide the basic framework for this study: Adrienne Rich in her essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980), Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990), and Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands* (1987). Working in and around each other, their theories provide the framework through which we can better understand Gertrude Stein and Djuna Barnes, their lives and their texts, as hybrid existences, as preliminary radical voices without which our current thoughts and understandings of feminism in the world might be very different. Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* is, above all, a feminist text that argues for increased acceptance of contrasting and clashing identities. In this sense, it is delineating and advocating hybrid existences. From the perspective of *Borderlands*, Rich’s theory of compulsory heterosexuality and Butler’s theory of gender play can be seen as progressive constructions of hybridity that augment our understanding of the hybrid world lived in and written about by Stein and Barnes.

Borderlands opens with a poem that highlights the constant war between what is natural and what man has constructed. “Across the border in Mexico / stark silhouette of houses gutted by waves, / cliffs crumbling into the sea, / silver waves marbled with spume / gashing a hole under the border fence” (23). This contrast reveals two things about Anzaldúa’s perspective on nature: First, the crumbling cliffs spilling into the sea are a part of the natural cycle of the world. Second, the image of the sea destabilizing the border fence shows that nature also has the power to reclaim and unite the spaces that men³ have divided. These word pictures highlight the theme of her entire text—the natural world has been

³ Throughout this thesis I refer to men, man and man-made. For the purposes of this study these words should connote the biological and social categories of men rather than the often-implied connotation of humans in general.

divided and subdivided unnaturally by patriarchy. These unnatural divisions, in turn, affect the way we live. They create conflict. They divide and sub-divide the earth into countries, states, cities. They pit people against people. During the ensuing struggle, history is made, then written and re-written by whatever group is in power. In the end, these boundaries make living difficult. By their very nature, boundaries, when drawn small enough, intersect with people, unnaturally dividing them into multiple identities. Societies built on boundaries make multiple identities and pluralities into negatives, into contradictions that cannot simultaneously exist together.

Borderlands offers up a real, personal experience of living across boundaries. While Anzaldúa's story is both personal and geo-politically specific, she also notes "the struggle of the *mestiza* is above all a feminist one. As long as *los hombres* think they have to *chingar mujeres* and each other to be men, as long as men are taught that they are superior and therefore culturally favored over *la mujer*, as long as to be a *vieja* is a thing of derision, there can be no real healing of our psyches" (106). This situation constitutes the cyclical nature of patriarchy and it is patriarchal culture with which Anzaldúa engages in "*la guerra de independencia*" (38). The goal of this war is to carve out a space where all of our different pieces, the pieces sectioned off by man-made borders, can come together to live as whole selves.

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa appropriates for herself the role of intellectual hybrid warrior; her arguments fall into three basic strategies. First, we need to uncover history. Secondly, we need to use that uncovered history to transform culture. Finally, we need to talk about it. For the first step, Anzaldúa dives into the history of her people, analyzing religious figures as they were before the Catholic church, the power group, took over during

colonization. As she traces the lineage of the goddess *Coatlicue* as she is transformed by the patriarchy into the Catholic virgin, Anzaldúa reveals the patriarchy at work transforming a religion based on nature—Earth goddesses and fertility goddesses—to a religion based on patriarchy. For Anzaldúa, this discovery reveals that women have been written out of history and, as Saldívar-Hull notes, it “strategically [reclaims] a ground for female historical presence” (6).

It is here that Anzaldúa’s theory loosely parallels Adrienne Rich’s concept of compulsory heterosexuality. In some ways, Anzaldúa calls for a reclamation of history that will, in turn, carve out a cultural presence for hybrid existence. In essence, the cultural notion of where a woman *must be* falls away via the establishment of an unbroken thread of female presences (and constructed absences) in history. Re-reading history, then, leads to a cultural change. Adrienne Rich, on the other hand, first carves out the cultural space so that women might uncover new elements of their history.

In “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” Rich challenges the “erasure of lesbian existence from so much of scholarly feminist literature” and “sketch[es] ... some bridge over the gap between *lesbian* and *feminist*” (Foreword11). According to Rich, the exclusion of lesbian existence from feminist circles represents a “retreat into sameness” that can only lead to “a renewed open season on difference” (Foreword 12). Throughout the text, Rich articulates a system of coercion operating against women of all kinds, directing, through multitudes of social controls, women towards men.

This system of coercion described by Rich has also been theorized by Louis Althusser in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation.”⁴ Within this work, Althusser targets two specific entities that regulate what is normal and accepted in society. The first is the Repressive State Apparatuses or the RSAs. According to Althusser, the RSAs “function massively and predominantly *by repression*” (138 emphasis original). Such apparatuses include the army and the police—entities that, for lack of a better phrase, come and get you when you have done something wrong; two women are accused of sodomy and are subsequently arrested. The majority of the social control, however, comes from much more mundane entities called the Ideological State Apparatuses or the ISAs. These include the church, the educational system, the family, the courts, the political system, the communications system, and the cultural system at large (136-7). Inside the sphere of compulsory heterosexuality, the church would teach that same sex relations are wrong; the political system would not guarantee marriage rights, health care benefits, or hospital visiting privileges to name a few examples. As Rich hints, this system is compulsory because it is naturalized, ubiquitous and invisible. “Culture forms our beliefs. We perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through culture. Culture is made by those in power—men” (38). Whether you label the entity state apparatuses, a system of coercion, or simply culture, the truth is the same. This system simultaneously turns women into the economic fuel for men while turning men into the enforcers of a police state.

⁴ I am not suggesting that Althusser was a feminist or a queer ally but rather that his theory provides another avenue for understanding the framework of social control.

In a move that is very similar to Anzaldúa's, Rich argues that history has been somehow altered. At the core of her argument, Rich posits a foundational thought—that women are “the earliest sources of emotional caring and physical nurture of both female and male children” (637). The pre-social origin of care leads Rich to a series of questions: “whether the search for love and tenderness in both sexes does not originally lead toward women; ... why species survival, the means of impregnation, and emotional / erotic relationships should ever have become so rigidly identified with each other; and why such violent strictures should be found necessary to enforce women's total emotional, erotic loyalty and subservience to men” (637). For Rich, then, it is not a natural event for erotic pleasure and the urge to repopulate the race to lead to heterosexual partnerships—the two separate needs have been conflated by a larger system of control. Rich pulls from Kathleen Gough's “The Origin of the Family” where men, across a territorially and temporally vast range of cultures, have and have had the power to “deny women sexuality or to force it upon them; to command or exploit their labor to control their produce; to control or rob them of their children; to confine them physically and prevent their movements; to use them as objects in male transactions; to cramp their creativeness; or to withhold from them large areas of the society's knowledge and cultural attainments” (638). For Rich, each of these eight methods “adds to the cluster of forces within which women have been convinced that marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable ... components of their lives” (640). Here, Rich undertakes Anzaldúa's same argument—men have hijacked women and women's history—across a much broader scale that includes a multitude of cultures. Whatever the scale of the argument, Rich contends that the culture, the state apparatuses, the system of coercion limits social imagination that might lead to other options.

Heterosexuality has been uniformly applied as a universal truth, creating women who are always already destined for a limited, oppressed, heterosexual existence.

Whereas Anzaldúa creates an ironclad argument for the presence of women in the culture by tracing the historical erasure of women, Rich argues for the formulation in present culture of a “lesbian existence” and a “lesbian continuum.” For Rich, a lesbian continuum represents redefining the categories of women’s relationships. “I mean the term *lesbian existence* to include a range—through each woman’s life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman” (648). She is not suggesting, then, that all women give up men but rather that they adopt “a bonding against male tyranny” (649). This inclusion, then, would allow women the space to examine and refigure their lives and their histories as functions of womanhood rather than as functions of a male support system. Such a system would allow for the uncovering of a history, a chance to “grasp breadths of female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly clinical, definitions of *lesbianism*” (649). Particularly important in this uncovering of history is Rich’s claim that “women have always resisted male tyranny. A feminism of action ... has constantly re-emerged in every culture and in every period” (652). Understanding this past opens the doors for women to appropriate it, using it to re-learn and re-figure their existences. These historical discoveries and re-orientations that are the end results of Rich’s theory, then, are the starting steps for Anzaldúa’s.

The end result of Anzaldúa’s careful analysis of history is exposure of the failed premises of cultural tyranny. By exposing the constructed nature of present culture—a culture that relegates women to certain beliefs and practices—Anzaldúa has opened a space

from which to create a new existence. Chapter Two of the text is titled “*Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan*” or Rebellious Movements and Traitorous Cultures. It is here that Anzaldúa begins to create her hybrid existence, separating elements of the present culture she will accept from the elements she will substitute with cultural traditions of the past. “I will no longer spend my life dumping cultural customs and values that have betrayed me. I have also gathered time proven customs and customs that respect women” (37 translated by Saldivar-Hull). This is not an outright rejection customs but an augmentation of them. By exposing faulty premises, she is free to add or subtract as she sees fit. Thus, it is a practice of accepting all parts of the culture, past and present—even the ones that spark a storm of incongruity.

There is a two-paragraph section of Chapter Two entitled “Half and Half.” As an augmentation of traditional, essentialist culture, it is significant for the consideration of Butler’s gender play. As such, it is quoted here in its entirety:

There was a *muchacha* who lived near my house. *La gente del pueblo* talked about her being *una de las otras*, “of the Others.” They said that for six months she was a woman who had a vagina that bled once a month, and that for the other six months she was a man, had a penis and she peed standing up. They called her half and half, *mita’ y mita’*, neither one nor the other but a strange doubling, a deviation of nature that horrified, a work of nature inverted. But there is a magic aspect in abnormality and so-called deformity. Maimed, mad, and sexually different people were believed to possess supernatural powers by primal cultures’ magico-religious thinking. For them, abnormality was the price a person had to pay for her or his inborn extraordinary gift.

There is something compelling about being both male and female, about having an entry into both worlds. Contrary to some psychiatric tenets [elements of modern, man-made culture], half and halves are not suffering from a confusion of sexual identity, or even from a confusion of gender. What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better. But I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within. (41).

Here, we see Anzaldúa rejecting portions of modern culture—“psychiatric tenets” that claim “half and halves” are suffering from confused identity—and replacing them with elements of the past—“magico-religious thinking.” Such practice tempers the essentialist nature of modern culture, thereby removing the perceived defect in being mixed and replacing it with a firm foundation or space on which, in which difference can stand.

Judith Butler undertakes similar work in *Gender Trouble* when she takes on contemporary feminist practice of relying on the man / woman, male / female false binaries. “Categories of true sex, discrete gender, and specific sexuality have constituted the stable point of reference for a great deal of feminist theory and politics” (175). Rather than allow the binary relationships to stand, Butler questions them. She asks, “is ‘the body’ itself shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by markers of sex?” (175). This question leads Butler to her concept of gender performativity—unconscious iterations of a larger system of social control.

To outline this concept of performativity Butler relies on the notion of a body as a map for social norms. She draws on Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* to provide an

example. Butler's interpretation of Foucault is that the strategy of enforcing laws involves writing those laws on the corporeal map. "[T]he strategy has been not to enforce a repression of their desires, but to compel their bodies to signify the prohibitive law as their very essence ... The law is not literally internalized, but incorporated, with the consequence that bodies are produced which signify that law on and through the body; there the law is manifest as the essence of their selves, the meaning of their soul, their conscience" (183). The law appears physically via transgression and any resultant punishment prescribed by the law. In other words, we might know about the law but we will not *see* the law until we see the signs of its transgression on a body.

For Butler, much the same is happening with gender. We perform gender on a daily basis and this calls the concept of gender into existence. "Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, ... the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (190). We may know that there are various biological differences between groups of people (male / female) but in our interiority there are no rules or regulations associated with those differences. We create those rules and regulations through our repeated performances. If everyone performed their gender in a uniform way, the physical presence of gendered bodies would essentially disappear. In other words, without various performances we would not be conjuring gender.

Our genders are displayed or performed by a series of signifying presences and absences written onto our body—it is "a *corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where '*performative*' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (190). Through time, various different performances have been

read as legitimate while others have been read as illegitimate. It is perceived to be *normal* for a man to perform his masculinity by making large gestures and taking up the maximum amount of space because that is how it has been done before.

The solution to the problem articulated by Butler's theory is our ability to change or resignify our performances. She describes such a resignification through the example of drag. By imitating another gender role or by performing the illegitimate, a dissonance arises between what society thinks *should* be there and what is actually being displayed. "*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*" (187 emphasis original). The dissonance created, then, between what *should* be there and what *is* there illuminates the constructed nature of gender itself. We are not born to spread our legs or make ourselves compact. On the contrary we imitate these actions that we see in other people. If we are always already imitating, why not imitate something else? By changing our performances, we open up "possibilities of gender transformation" that "are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction" (192). In other words, changing our performances not only has the power to change our notion of identity but also has the power to change the politics of identity. It is this deconstruction of gender and subsequent gender play that creates the space for difference to exist. The dissonance created takes away culture's ability to muffle the existence of plurality and opens space for Anzaldúa's "half and halves" to exist.

These actions—appropriating past culture, creating dissonance in the present culture—allow Anzaldúa to fully theorize a space for plurality to exist. As she says, "I will

not glorify those aspects of my culture which have injured me in the name of protecting me. So, don't give me your tenets and your laws. Don't give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultures—white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding white ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails” (44). “I will stand and claim my space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture” (44).

A significant portion of this individual space, of the architecture used to attain it, comes through writing. Anzaldúa's Chapter Five, entitled “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” opens, in part, with a quote from Ray Gwyn Smith: “Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?” (75). Anzaldúa's personal experience with language inequality comes from her geo-social experience with border crossing. She describes the plight of Chicano people: “For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castillian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language?” (77). Chicano language, then, becomes a mix—Standard English, Working class and slang English, Standard Spanish, Standard Mexican Spanish, North Mexican Spanish dialect, Chicano Spanish, Tex-Mex, and *Pachuco* (77). Anzaldúa does more than simply relate the struggle over language to the specific ethnic group. Rather, she pushes the struggle outward to a new sense of feminist nationalism. According to Saldivar-Hull, “[t]his new historian subtly prods Chicano males to understand feminist rebellion as twin to the racialized class rebellion advocated by the cultural nationalists.

Anzaldúa redefines cultural identity through gender and sexuality. And the now-transformed nationalism and gendered Aztlán are rescripted as feminist theory and New Mestiza consciousness” (5). By relating the struggle to feminism, Anzaldúa makes the struggle for language more than a racially-bound struggle for political equality. Instead, it becomes the struggle for all minority groups forced to live at the intersection of borders. It is this larger struggle that we can relate to early navigators of hybridity—Stein and Barnes.

Like Stein and Barnes (and the modernist movement as a whole), Anzaldúa incorporates literary innovation as a way to break out of the language prison. Rather than writing solely from the framework of one accessible language, Anzaldúa writes in multiple tongues, seamlessly integrating words and entire sentences in languages other than English. While this creates a text that remains inaccessible to “those who refuse full engagement with the linguistic demands of Border language” (Saldívar-Hull 8), it both creates and demonstrates a new critical discourse that mimics the other themes of the text—it doesn’t replace one language with another based on hierarchical borders. Instead, it accepts whatever languages it needs to solidify the act of writing as that of publicly proclaiming the creation of a space of existence. As Anzaldúa says, “I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent’s tongue—my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence” (81).

Tracing the moves between Anzaldúa, Rich, and Butler enables us to incorporate the latter two into a larger discourse on hybridity. As my analysis of Stein’s *Autobiography* and Barnes’s *Nightwood* will show, these three theories can and do operate together under the

rubric of hybridity and are key to understanding the lives and texts of two women who became both literal and figurative border crossers in the early twentieth century.

Chapter Three: Drafting a Whole Self in Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

"My sentences do get under their skin, only they do not know that they do..."

Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

On September 6, 1933, William Troy's review of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* appeared in *The Nation*. Inside this review, Troy hits upon the eternal questions of Gertrude Stein: "What, precisely, has she been trying to do these many years?" and "What, if any, is the value of what she has done?" (67). Gertrude Stein, the writer and the person, has been the subject of endless debate since her arrival in the Parisian art scene in 1907. There were reviewers who pegged her as a genius—"Gertrude Stein has an extraordinary power of personality and it is my impression that she has the clearest intelligence I have ever encountered" (Bromfield 63). There were other reviewers who made fun, writing in mock Steinean prose—"Alice B. Toklas [sic] by Gertrude Stein is not to read it though buy it. Publishers must live. Full of backgammon and spinach. But Charles aged eleven going on twelve said a mouthful when he said with the wisdom of serpents and harmlessness of doves Gertrude Stein is like The Emperor's Clothes [sic]" (Knickerbocker 70). Ulla E. Dydo, in *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises*, sums up this range of negative opinions: "...most publishers and editors refused her as illiterate or mad—a faker or simply a capricious lady. What little was published left many readers angry. They turned the tables on her, blaming her for writing incomprehensibly rather than themselves for failing to comprehend. They ridiculed her and her work" (13). Dydo goes on to note that "anyone reading Stein must understand what it is like for an artist to live under incessant, condescending assaults upon herself as a writer, a persona, and a woman" (13). In many ways, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* comes as a response to criticisms of Stein's writing, her public image, and her womanhood. This chapter seeks to uncover the

Autobiography as an early experiment in hybridity—an attempt to write a world where Stein the writer, Stein the public figure, and Stein the private, masculine-acting woman could exist together.

As this study is based, from the historical perspective, on physical moves from the United States to Paris, it is perhaps best to start with Stein’s version of this event as recorded in her texts. In the *Autobiography*, Stein chronicles the literal border crossing—from the United States to Paris—made by her lover, Alice B. Toklas. Although this move takes up a seemingly insignificant portion of the text, it is indicative of Stein’s views on social existence in the United States and in Paris. The juxtaposition of these two societies, as treated here by Stein, forms the fundamental basis of the text not only as a societal critique but also as a framework through which we can view the text as a hybrid construction.

She addresses Toklas’s physical move in the first chapter where she provides the reader a summary of Alice’s life in San Francisco: “I led a pleasant life, I had many friends, much amusement many interests, my life was reasonably full and I enjoyed it but I was not very ardent in it” (4). This “pleasant life,” constructed, we can infer, by the day-to-day activities of a woman in San Franciscan society, is interrupted by a natural event—the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. This natural event strikes to the core of Toklas’s being. For others, it seems to be less important. “The first terrible morning of the San Francisco fire I woke [my father] and told him, the city has been rocked by an earthquake and is now on fire” (4). Her father’s response, “[t]hat will give us a black eye in the East, ... turning and going to sleep again” (4), serves to underscore Toklas’s awareness of this recent natural intervention and its potentialities. It is during this revealing interlude that Stein inserts modernity into her version of Toklas’s historical record. In response to the earthquake, Gertrude Stein’s brother and wife return to San Francisco bringing three

Matisse paintings, better known to Stein as “the first modern things to cross the Atlantic” (5).

Toklas meets Mrs. Stein “at this time of general upset” and is told for the first time about life and possibility in Paris. The construction of this section places the natural disaster and modernism on parallel levels as interventions in Toklas’s life. In this way, the modernist intervention becomes equally as important as the natural intervention. This construction creates a space for Stein’s modernism and modernist lifestyle—elements of hybridity to be examined later in this chapter—to be seen as viable alternatives to the “pleasant” life Toklas had been enjoying up until that time. As Toklas ostensibly says, “In this way my new full life began” (5).

It is worth noting that Stein also treats her own literal border crossing in such a way that, to be sure, it augments her own narcissism. It also, however, bespeaks Stein’s commitment to this hybrid world she was constructing and writing in Paris. Whereas Toklas is seen as needing a series of interventions to break her out of the man-made world, Stein characterizes herself as always already separate from the machinations of society and its man-made borders.

This move can be most clearly seen as Stein chronicles the years immediately prior to her settling in Paris. In this passage, during her tenure in medical school, Stein’s sense of physical place begins to blur: “During these years at Radcliffe and Johns Hopkins she often spent the summers in Europe. The last couple of years her brother had been settled in Florence and now that everything medical was over she joined him there and later they settled down in London for the winter” (83). One page later, Stein moves again: “one day she said she was leaving for America and she left. She stayed in America the rest of the winter. In the meantime her brother also had left London and gone to Paris and there later she joined him” (84). Not only do her physical moves from country to country happen in sentence-long blips, she also portrays herself as being above contemporary social issues.

When Stein chose not to take her medical degree, a friend, Marion Walker, intervenes, pleading that Stein “remember the cause of women” to which Stein replies “you don’t know what it is to be bored” (82). For a writer who certainly does not shy away from the cause of women in other texts such as *Three Lives*, this veritable abandonment of women as a social issue is puzzling. Later, Stein offers clarification:

It was only a few years ago that Marion Walker, Gertrude Stein’s old friend, came to see her at Bilignin where we spend the summer. She and Gertrude Stein had not met since those old days nor had they corresponded but they were as fond of each other and disagreed as violently about the cause of women as they did then. Not, as Gertrude Stein explained to Marion Walker, that she at all minds the cause of women or any other cause but it does not happen to be her business. (83)

Here, Stein makes firm her stance on social issues—they aren’t her business. Stein, living a life far removed from the struggles of women in the United States, indeed having always lived a life without firm rooting to any particular place and / or its causes, sees no reason to concern herself with them. She was effectively living in a hybridized version of society that was unconcerned with such affairs. Her purpose was to write the world she was busy creating in Paris.

To write this world, Stein focused a great deal on the comprising elements as well as the content of her writing. Bryce Conrad, in “Gertrude Stein in the American Marketplace,” hails Stein as “the first truly Modernist writer of the twentieth century” (215). It is possible to agree or disagree with this analysis but what is true is that Stein spent her formative years as a principal figurehead of a literary and artistic movement wherein she worked to push the boundaries of the written word. She is known, for example, for her famous concept of writing like painting and painting like writing. In addition to bridging the gap between different media, scholars have

claimed that she worked to bridge other, more nebulous boundaries. As stated by Patricia Meyerowitz in the introduction to the Dover edition of Stein's *How to Write*, "[o]ne most important thing to know is that there is no separation between thinking and feeling and the act of writing. It is all done at the same time" (ix). Dydo echoes this sentiment: to understand Stein is "...to talk and listen at the same time" (3). Bridging boundaries between artistic media, feeling and writing, talking and listening can all be understood as acts of hybridity. Before Stein, the possibilities for processing and recording the world, the differences between feeling and writing, the differences between talking and listening were all perceived as separate and fixed, delineated by boundaries. In essence, to read Stein is to tap into a different level of consciousness, a consciousness of the world and our place inside it.

To further explore this new consciousness, I turn to Dydo's groundbreaking work, *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises*. In it, Dydo traces Stein's literary voice through more than thirty texts and correspondences offering insight into the underpinnings of Stein's words. This new consciousness, she explains, is difficult, requiring "a radical redefinition of genre, representation, language, reading, and writing" (12). Within this radical new framework, Dydo highlights two goals that are central to understanding Stein's literary work as a whole: the goal of the literal words themselves and the goal for those words in the world.

Following the famous adage, Stein wrote what she knew. "Over and over Stein said that she composed what she saw; she did not invent. All her work arises from the world in which she lived" (Dydo 17). The concept of individual perception and its relation to the world fascinated Stein. She aimed to change individual perception of the world by forcing the reader to question his or her original thought process. The goal was to make the reader think and uncover something new out of existing words. Her texts worked toward this goal by forcing the reader

into a situation of dissonance. Stein herself leaves evidence of this concept in *The Autobiography*. Throughout the text, Stein offers explanations of the modernist movement and the work taking place within it. For example, she gives us Matisse, who “used his distorted drawing as a dissonance is used in music or as vinegar or lemons are used in cooking or egg shells in coffee to clarify” (41). New clarity came from joining brush strokes—and, for Stein, words—together in new ways to create a sense of discomfort. Creating this discomfort with words was achieved through decontextualization.

In a 1934 issue of *Modern Music*, Gilbert Seldes notes that Stein “strips all meanings from words” (qtd. in Dydo 13). This process forces the reader to dig around for meaning, forming new thought processes and eventually creating something new. According to Dydo, these new combinations and the resultant dissonance were not without purpose. Much like later feminist theorists from Woolf to Cixous, Rich to Butler, much like Gloria Anzaldúa’s meditations on border crossing, Stein’s goal was to break the uniformity of language, and thereby break the uniformity of the world. For Stein, “questioning the forms of perception went with questioning the forms of language” (Dydo 17). According to Dydo, “her rejection of the rigid conventions of language led her gradually to dissociate herself from all inflexible forms, including hierarchical thinking, authoritarian organization, prescriptive grammar, and chronological narrative—aspects of the patriarchy” (17). Whether she started with this larger goal of breaking through established boundaries of thinking and existing or whether the style of writing she discovered and pioneered led her to the goal is endlessly debatable. What stands firmly for Dydo, however, is that “all her work is a demonstration of possibilities of grammar for democracy. She was interested in spacious, living sentences” (17). The implications of phrases like “fighting patriarchy” and “opening up democracy” for the study of Gertrude Stein, the writer

and the person, are immense—they settle her works, the *Autobiography* included, firmly in the tradition of social engagement and, more important, social disruption.

The notion of genre itself is an additional element of the *Autobiography* that is important to its existence as a hybrid text. As Franziska Gygax notes in *Gender and Genre in Gertrude Stein*, a major component of autobiography rests on a “centered self that is not shattered, split, or destabilized” (61). One must have, then, the ability to appear both as subject and object of the work in question. Gygax notes, however, that “deconstructionist theory has claimed that we must do away with notions” (61) of such a self—we must consider autobiography as the element that splits the self. For Gygax this theoretical move is problematic for the autobiography of women as women have never been regarded as whole or complete entities. It is this notion of an already divided self that plays so well in the *Autobiography*. In the September 3, 1933 edition of *The New York Herald-Tribune Books*, Louis Bromfield muses on these already divided selves: “Throughout her life as an experimenter with words and sentences, I suspect that Gertrude Stein the writer has been plagued by being Gertrude Stein the individual, Gertrude Stein the person. She is forever becoming between her own work and her public” (64). Stein, as a public figure, must deal with the ramifications of her inner identity, and her outer persona. It was this very separation between inner identity and outward interpretation, that both allowed and “led her to experiment with and subvert traditional autobiography” (Gygax 62). In subverting the genre, Stein was able to appropriate it for her own uses and in turn, use the genre to unite the self.

Two forms of such appropriation have been articulated by Bryce Conrad and Helga Lénert-Cheng. In “Gertrude Stein and the American Marketplace,” Conrad analyzes the commercial success of the *Autobiography* in the United States—a feat Stein had been laboring over for years. This success, he argues, came at a cost. According to Conrad, the book “sold

well largely because Stein did what she had eschewed in her writing up to that point: she had subordinated her literary intentions to market factors, speaking directly to an audience, presenting herself as a personality who had stood at the forefront of the century's avant-garde movements in literature and the visual arts" (216). For Conrad, then, Stein incorporates a different writing style that, in a way, bows down to her public. In "Autobiography as Advertisement: Why do Gertrude Stein's Sentences Get under Our Skin?" Helga Lénárt-Cheng also maintains that Stein wrote the book to ingratiate herself to the American audience but adds an additional lure: "...an autobiographer can manipulate not only public issues ... but his [sic] autobiography can have a similarly decisive role in modifying public opinion concerning the values of his [sic] *own art*" (117). For Lénárt-Cheng, then, Stein was not only reaching to an audience by altering her writing, she was applying specific marketing tricks to entice that audience to read her other works which, as Bryce Conrad points out, were faring dismally if they were published at all.⁵

While both Conrad and Lénárt-Cheng make excellent cases for their claims, the *Autobiography* serves a significant purpose beyond that of marketing or simple audience relation—the text serves to unite two conflicting sides of Stein thereby creating a place for Stein and, according to Lénárt-Cheng, her art, in the American marketplace and, concomitantly, with the American people. Stein makes the same move that Anzaldúa argues for in *Borderlands*: she effectively refuses to accept the boundaries—of place, of sexuality, of gender identity—set forth before her and, instead, uses the genre of autobiography to write a space of existence.

⁵ It is worth noting that Dydo disagrees with Conrad and Lénárt-Cheng. According to Dydo, "[h]er texts do not progress linearly from one concern, say, with grammar, or with the novel, to another, nor do they go as I had earlier thought, from 'real writing' to public or audience writing. They never move away from real writing, and Stein's real voice was never lost" (5).

Stein's most significant appropriation of the autobiographical genre is, of course, that of Toklas's voice. Lynn Z. Bloom undertakes to explore this element of appropriation in "Gertrude Is Alice Is Everybody: Innovation and Point of View in Gertrude Stein's Autobiographies." For Bloom, the appropriation of Toklas' voice in the *Autobiography* performs three specific functions—an egotistical, an interpretive, and an objective function. The egotistical function allows Stein to, in a way, sing her own praises while at the same time subverting narcissistic accusations. The interpretive function allows Stein to provide explanations and rationales for difficult, experimental art movements while the objective function allows Stein to sculpt a specific image of herself through Toklas's ostensibly impartial outside perspective. While Bloom's article provides many solid interpretations of Stein's use of Toklas's voice, it is Bloom's third function—the objective—that contributes most directly to an analysis of gender play in the text. When taking the silencing of Stein's sexuality and the revision of her gender into account, it becomes visible that, as Stein sculpts a specific image of herself through Toklas's voice, she is simultaneously wiping away all traces of her own lesbian identity. She appears, at first glance, to set Toklas up as the scapegoat for this crime of sexuality.

This wiping of sexuality is set up in Chapter One of the *Autobiography*, a two-page segment that is the extent of any focused biography on Toklas herself. The textual brevity of Toklas's background is telling—it simultaneously offers the primary characterization of Alice B. Toklas while also denoting the speed with which Stein is able to diffuse her real-life lesbian existence and replace it with something considered more appropriate for consumption in the United States.

In the third paragraph of the *Autobiography*, we have Toklas ostensibly describing herself: "I myself have had no liking for violence and have always enjoyed pleasures of

needlework and gardening. I am fond of paintings, furniture, tapestry, houses and flowers and even vegetables and fruit-trees. I like a view but I like to sit with my back turned to it” (4).

Toklas is characterized here on two different levels. First, she is portrayed in a way that one might say is typically feminine. She has no taste for violence, enjoys needlework and gardening, painting and furniture, houses and flowers. On one level, then, Toklas is providing a perspective that Stein herself can’t give without breaking her own sense of identity—Stein frames both Toklas and the text from feminine standpoints. This move is telling. A bankable book by a woman, about a woman must fit into the box that defines womanhood. If it does not, it will likely be labeled as dangerous, too avant-garde, too experimental, and certainly not safe to read.

The second level of Toklas’ characterization in this short paragraph is somewhat subtler. She is a *feminine* creature, yes, who enjoys *feminine* things in life but she is also characterized as a people watcher, a move that will be continued throughout the text. By saying, “I like a view but I like to sit with my back turned to it,” Stein is denoting Toklas as a people watcher, as one who would rather watch people than admire view. This notion of Toklas continues throughout the text. Later in the first paragraph she expounds on this quality in previewing her life-to-be with Stein. It is during Stein’s brother’s and, concomitantly, modernism’s visit to San Francisco that Toklas gets an inkling of what her life will become. “As I was saying we were all living comfortably together and there had been in my mind no active desire or thought of change. The disturbance of the routine of our lives by the fire followed by the coming of Gertrude Stein’s older brother and his wife made the difference” (5). Before Stein’s introduction into her life, Toklas was content watching the people around her, as she didn’t know anything else. After this first visit, however, Toklas finds something more fascinating to gaze upon and heads to Paris. In the final sentences of the first chapter Toklas offers the reader a preview of what is to come: “I

have met many important people, I have met several great people but I have only known three first class geniuses and in each case on sight within me something rang. In no one of the three cases have I been mistaken. In this way my new full life began” (5). Here again we see Toklas’s tendency to watch people. In declaring that her new, full life had begun when Stein entered the picture, Toklas is further cementing her role as the feminine creature who watches from the sidelines. In doing so, Stein has provided an explanation for their intense partnership. Toklas is no longer Stein’s lover but rather an intensely interested third party who follows Stein around for the simple reason that Stein is intensely interesting.

The evidence of the success of these first moves within the *Autobiography* can be seen in the reviews that circulated in the United States at the time of its release. Toklas is not represented as the long-time partner or the lover of Stein in any of the reviews. Instead she is “the faithful friend” (Fay 57), “the friend with whom she has for so long lived in Paris” (Nelson 392), the “secretary-companion” (Troy 66), or as “Miss Toklas ... the enthusiastic admirer and obedient shadow of Miss Stein” who “turns toward [Stein] as the sunflower toward the sun” (Wilson). It should be noted that Fay and Nelson’s references to Toklas as friend and faithful friend, as well as Troy’s “companion,” might allude to something more in circles where such things as sexual transgressions were part of the times. Whether the reviewers of *The New Republic*, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, *The Nation*, or *American Literature* did or did not read into Stein’s sexuality is difficult to tell. It can reasonably be said, however, that the *Autobiography* didn’t give them any reason to think beyond their initial impressions.

The trope of Toklas as the watcher woman continues throughout the text working to both solidify her character as an explanation for her partnership with Stein as well as affirm her characterization as the feminine one. We are often reminded throughout the text that “[t]he

geniuses came and talked to Gertrude Stein and the wives sat with me” (Stein 87). Here we are reminded that Stein attracted the (always male) geniuses, an act which likely would have happened with or without Toklas. Toklas’ presence, however, as the constant observer gives us a window into that world through her constant, steadfast presence. Presented in such a light, Toklas as the stalker of Stein’s activities may seem strange to the average reader but in the end, after the revelations and gossip provided about the founding and the sustaining of a then famous art movement, the reader is glad Toklas was there.

In “Gertrude Stein and the Lesbian Lie,” Catharine R. Stimpson argues that Stein has effectively, and shamefully, erased from the *autobiography* any trace of her lesbian relationship with Toklas. While it is true that Stein’s characterizations of Toklas seems to document a relationship that, on some level, appears to be either a diffused friendship or a mimicry of heterosexual relationships—both criticisms of Stein’s treatment of sexuality—from the context of hybridity, from the context of Adrienne Rich’s concept of lesbian continuum, the need for specific relational categories vanishes. Rather than needing, then, specific categories that delineate platonic friendships, heteronormative relationships, and queer relationships, Rich calls for the erasure of boundaries. The relationship between Stein and Toklas doesn’t need to be categorized; it simply is.

It is here that we can also begin to see the extent to which Stein works to modify the perceptions of her own gender. It is, after all, the art world through which Gertrude Stein displays her most consistent and sustained gender play by referring again and again to the movement, its champions, and most importantly, her own status within it. Reviewers at the time of publication noted that Stein was a “definite moral force in the then struggling modern movement” (McMahon 26) and that she “knows what art is” (Bromfield 64), indicating Stein’s

success in packaging herself as a center of the movement itself. The question then becomes, what is this movement? How is the world of art itself portrayed in the text? In a rare moment when Toklas is separated from Stein, Toklas's voice provides a telling characterization of a major art exhibition: "In America, even in San Francisco, I had been accustomed to see women at picture shows and some men, but here [in Paris] were men, men, men, sometimes women with them but more often three or four men with one woman, sometimes five or six men with two women" (19). Lest the reader think that Gertrude Stein's place in the art world is in keeping with traditions in the United States, she assures us that she is indeed operating in an arena dominated by men. The contrast with the (feminine) art world of the United States is telling. In this excerpt, Stein deliberately portrays the art world in the United States as a feminine pursuit; it is a place where women are the predominant figures. Art itself, then, becomes a feminine pursuit for American culture. Not so in Paris. Stein's place in the Parisian art world becomes a move to position Stein in-between genders. As an American, it is acceptable for Stein the woman to be the figurehead of an artistic movement. That the movement is taking place in a male-dominated Parisian art world subtly lifts Stein the character out of the typically feminine role without raising the eyebrows of too many American readers. This move simultaneously legitimizes Stein's feminine presence within art while pointing to her as a more masculine entity. As we move through the *Autobiography* we are continuously reminded of the masculine world of art and letters through instances that are overtly stated such as in the excerpt above. There are also indirect references to this phenomenon.

One such instance occurs in Chapter Three when Toklas's voice takes us through major artistic innovations that had happened between the years of 1903 and 1907:

In the long struggle with the portrait of Gertrude Stein, Picasso passed from the Harlequin ... to the intensive struggle which was to end with cubism. Gertrude Stein had written the story of Melanctha the negress ... which was the first definite step away from the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century in literature. Matisse had painted the *Bonheur de Vivre* and had created the new school of color ... (54)

Sandwiched in-between major artistic figures and their innovations—Picasso and cubism, Matisse and use of color—Stein inserts herself without missing a beat. Not only is Stein portrayed in-between two of the most important artists of the twentieth-century, she also charges herself and her writing with ushering in an entire new century. This would have been a bold move for any woman to make but, as demonstrated above, Stein has already characterized the art world in the United States as feminine. Proclaiming herself to have ushered in a new century of literature is still well within the safe feminine world of the target audience.

If Stein pays homage to her masculine endeavors within the Parisian art scene, she also pays particular attention to women as supporters of that scene. There are numerous examples throughout the text of women relegated to tasks that support the art world. Women pose for portraits, as Gertrude Stein does for Picasso; women keep house for the male artists; women type and copy-edit manuscripts as Alice does. One particularly telling example of women as typists comes when Stein attempts to type the manuscript of *Three Lives*. While the quote is lengthy it offers a glimpse at the collision of masculine art and feminine assistance:

Gertrude Stein tried to copy *Three Lives* on the typewriter but it was no use, it made her nervous, so Etta Cone came to the rescue. ... Etta Cone offered to typewrite *Three Lives* and she began. Baltimore is famous for the delicate sensibilities and conscientiousness of its inhabitants. It suddenly occurred to Gertrude Stein that she had not told Etta Cone to

read the manuscript before beginning to typewrite it. She went to see her and there indeed was Etta Cone faithfully copying the manuscript letter by letter so that she might not by any indiscretion become conscious of the meaning. Permission to read the text having been given the typewriting went on. (52-3)

That Stein, already established as a prominent figure in the masculine art world, is inherently unable to perform the tedious task of copying the manuscript from her hand into type reinforces the characterization of Stein as a non-feminine entity, an entity slightly apart from the feminine. For this early text she tries to do the work herself but finds that it rattles her nerves. In her inability to perform the task she is characterizing herself as inherently different than feminine members of her sex who seem cut out for this type of work. She is, then, characterizing herself as more masculine than feminine. The divide between masculine and feminine is further widened when Cone, a woman from Boston with “delicate sensibilities,” copies the text one letter at a time in order to avoid any absorption of meaning. In setting up the task of copying the text in such a way, Stein gives depth and breadth to the chasm between masculine work and feminine work. Not only is she unable to perform the task herself, but Cone, who graciously volunteers, is so far distanced from the masculine literary text that she puts it on a pedestal of greatness, assuming that she’s too incompetent—as a mere woman—to try to understand it.

While I have spent a great deal of time uncovering Stein’s moves to distance herself from feminine sensibilities in the text, it is important to note that the text doesn’t fully align Stein with masculinity; she does not become a self-sufficient male-like entity. This is most clearly seen in sections of the *Autobiography* that deal with the publishing world. Stein relies most heavily on John Lane and Carl Van Vechten as her representatives to this world. Indeed she relies on them so heavily that she sulks when John Lane passes. “But no publisher will look at it now that John

Lane is no longer active” (207). Without her male champion, her “in” to the publishing world, Stein is under the assumption that all hope is lost. Stein herself makes no moves to pursue a place in this particular masculine arena. Such a move would have likely taken Stein out of the safe zone for readers in a hegemonic United States. Keeping herself positioned between women and men keeps her under the radar of men who control the publishing world.

Nevertheless, the evidence of specifically gendered characterizations is prevalent throughout the *Autobiography*. There is one more instance that I would like to revisit here—specific mentions of women’s rights. Two passages mention the cause of women directly; they are both in the chapter that serves as the prelude to Stein’s life in Paris. While at medical school Stein is faced with not getting her degree due to one failing mark. The possibility of a woman having a medical degree had caused great stir around the campus, a great stir that Stein ignored. “Her very close friend Marion Walker pleaded with her, she said, but Gertrude Stein remember the cause of women, and Gertrude Stein said, you don’t know what it is to be bored” (82). One potential reading of this passage suggests that Stein is simply bored with the tedium of medical school. Another reading, however, shows Stein shunning the political cause of women as uninteresting, beneath her. The text seems to privilege this second reading—indeed later, Stein affirms her non-committal status regarding women’s rights. “Not, as Gertrude Stein explained to Marion Walker, that she at all minds the cause of women or any other cause but it does not happen to be her business” (83). These two passages are the only places in the entirety of the *Autobiography* where Stein overtly places women beneath her. To further analyze the implications of these two excerpts requires a closer look at points in the text where Stein breaks with the very gendered themes she has established.

After establishing the trope that the Parisian art world is dominated by men with women serving as its supporters, Stein bends back on that theme further problematizing the characterizations of gender within the *Autobiography*. After giving the reader Etta Cone the typist, Matisse's wife who makes do with no food so Matisse can paint, and, most prominently Toklas who serves in many ways as Stein's literary and social secretary, Stein then gives us Hemingway, the supporter of Stein's literature. When Hemingway urges Stein to publish her *The Making of Americans* in Ford Madox Ford's journal *The Transatlantic*, Stein tells Hemingway that there is no copy of the text except the bound copy which would not do for publication. "That makes no difference, said Hemingway, I will copy it. And he and I between us did copy it and it was printed in the next number of the Transatlantic" (215). The breakup of Stein and Hemingway's friendship was quite public, documented in the *Autobiography* as well as in two works by Hemingway: "The True Story of My Break With Gertrude Stein," an article published before the release of the *Autobiography*, and *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway's memoir surrounding his times in Paris. Stein's play on her self-established gender characteristics could be seen, then, as a slap in the face to Hemingway who was and has been traditionally characterized as the alpha male. Characterizing Hemingway in the same feminine way as she does the women supporters of art deflates this wildly popularized masculinity. It also raises the question, are there any other places where Stein bends back on her own themes of gendered characterization?

There is another intriguing excerpt that works to undo the system that Stein has created. Toklas tells us, "I always say that you cannot tell what a picture really is or what an object really is until you dust it every day and you cannot tell what a book is until you type it or proof-read it. It then does something to you that only reading never can do" (113). Here Stein is reversing her

belittling characterization of women's contributions to the important world of art. While women remain, throughout the text, the creatures that sustain the movement through what amounts to menial labor, they seem to gain something more from their task than others might from simply reading the work. Indeed, through dusting and proof-reading women are getting a more in-depth view of how the world is shaped. This view offers an entirely different perspective of the world than men would most likely find, and it seems that Stein is allowing Toklas's voice to privilege that view over the masculine one.

Looking back on the two excerpts regarding women's rights, this breaking of patterns of characterizations within the text sheds a more complicated light on the situation. When Stein tells Marion Walker that Walker doesn't know what it is to be bored, perhaps Stein isn't being as harsh towards women's rights as it seems upon first glance. Perhaps Stein is revolting against the very notion of women's rights and women's work rather than demeaning it as superficial or lowly. Earlier in the text Stein established for the reader that men create the art and women support the men and that women's rights are none of her business. Turning around and de-establishing those textual rules by characterizing the hyper-masculine Hemingway as a (feminine) supporter of the modernist movement and privileging women's experience of art over men's constitutes a breakdown of the *Autobiography's* system of gendered characterization. If Stein is breaking the system of gender in her text (and in the larger world), then perhaps she is pointing to the blurring of all gender boundaries, not just the ones that are commercially *beneficial* for her to blur. This would allude to a more generalized notion of gender within the *Autobiography* as a whole. Perhaps Stein's method for gaining access to the male-dominated publishing industry and, in tandem, the hegemonic, largely socially conservative readership in the United States is not merely to blur the boundaries for herself, but to blur the boundaries for

everyone involved, creating another element of her hybrid world overlapping the United States and Paris.

As scholars such as Phoebe Stein Davis and Sarah Wilson have shown, Stein remained acutely aware of events in the United States despite her extended time away in Paris. Stein herself alludes to this continued interest in the United States within the text of the *Autobiography*. “She rarely read French newspapers, she never read anything in French, and she always read the Herald” (144). This consistent familiarity with the events of the United States implies that Stein’s intellect, despite her self-imposed physical distance, never left the United States. When thought of in tandem with the texts she left behind, this continued intellectual engagement with the United States helps us understand some of what Stein was working for in her literary innovation. Her words sought to break down barriers between genders and sexuality. In this context, Stein’s gender play appears as a subtle, additional revolt against the hegemonic cultural practices within her home country. While she makes self-serving moves to position herself between the categories of men and women, Stein’s *Autobiography*, when analyzed in terms of Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich, and Gloria Anzaldúa, is also an exercise in advanced hybridity.

From her lived experience as a border crosser and as a cultivator and curator of a lifestyle spanning both sides of the border, Stein gives us a text that mimics her life. The *Autobiography* delineates the socio-political borders, crosses them, and then, at the point of border crossing, creates a hybrid identity. Through her gender play Stein simultaneously presents a work that is comprehensible and safe for the average American reader as well as a text that strives to covertly blur the boundaries between men and women and, concomitantly, the notions of prescribed sexuality. What is left behind is a widely-read text that seeks to break down oppressive

boundaries not just as a carefully plotted marketing ploy but also as a look forward to the future. From this perspective and in light of contemporary feminist theory and recent cultural events, Gertrude Stein can truly be seen as ushering in the twentieth (and perhaps even the twenty-first) century.

Chapter Four: Hybrid Impossibilities in Barnes's *Nightwood*

*"No man needs curing of his individual sickness; his universal
malady is what he should look to."*

Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

In *Nightwood*, Djuna Barnes, a prominent expatriate who ran in different circles than Stein, also creates a hybrid world. While notions of compulsory heterosexuality and gender play are present in *Nightwood*, they are present in a less obvious way than in Stein's *Autobiography*. Out of the three theorists mentioned in Chapter Two, Barnes's work with hybridity is most closely related to Anzaldúa's and her ever-present contrast between nature and human intervention established in the opening lines of *Borderlands*. Barnes, working decades before Anzaldúa, establishes this boundary between natural human instinct and constructed societal behavior. Her exploration of both sides of this boundary provides the basis for my look at *Nightwood* as a hybrid text.

In a section, entitled "A Way of Life," of her memoir notes, Barnes conjures an image of life in Paris before the Second World War that overflows with the gravitas of hindsight and the burden of regret. "We were taking in the last breaths of Rome before the fall, Carthage before the destruction, Pompeii before the ruins. No one in our generation will ever again taste it as it was. Like that now famous Madeleine that was dipped in tea, we should bring up its memory with gratitude and love, astonishment and terror, we have walked with Thaïs before she died" (*Collected Poems* 245). The section later ends with a telling line: "The terrifying part of it is that it is done. Not what we did, but that it is over" (247). Read in context, Barnes attributes substantial meaning to life as it was lived by the expatriates in Paris. Attached to these lines are emotions of drive and necessity, a group of people doing important work aimed at a specific,

targeted goal. If one is to trust the title of the section, that goal was, simply, living. As if correcting a misconception, Barnes clarifies that it was not the work itself, not the living, that was scary but rather the end of the work and its latent result. If this is the framework from which we read this line, the next question becomes what was the work they were doing? What, for Djuna Barnes, was the work of living in Paris? For Barnes, the work of living in Paris was the work of carving out space for conflicting identities to exist. The culmination of this work, and the results as Barnes saw them, are represented in *Nightwood*.

To understand this work of living as it appeared in her written works, it is necessary to pause and take note of the sociohistorical context within which Barnes lived. Noel Riley Fitch articulates a laundry list of reasons Paris resonated as a gathering place during the first half of the twentieth century. Among the reasons, Fitch targets the breakdown of American isolationism following the First World War, the creation of new modes of inexpensive travel, and a favorable exchange rate (163). Apart from these, however, Fitch also highlights legal restrictions placed on life in the United States. As Fitch notes, “[t]he United States tried to regulate reading as well as drinking habits” (164). Shari Benstock confirms this rejection of social regulation in *Women of the Left Bank*: when expatriates left the United States they often “resented the moral and psychological restraints of America—evidenced in the prohibition laws and staunch middle-class Protestantism inherent in the work ethic—and wished for the freedom of self-determination that was provided by Europe” (13). Further complicating the image of social restriction are D’Emilio and Freedman who delineate the rise of a homosexual identity more concrete than loose homosexual desires (226-9). This identity, Benstock notes, clashed with social malaise and punitive backlash and was seen, along with literature, alcohol, and religion, as one more thing that had come under the control of a limiting, essentialist system. The increased consciousness

of a subversive sexuality resulted in the oppression and eventual submersion of a group of people (10).

In the notes for her memoirs, Djuna Barnes herself highlights some of the reasons for Paris as it was. When speaking of the writers who came there, she notes that “[s]ome stepped over the border into Italy, and some into Spain, and some landed on the African shores, and all went to Berlin, and some to Chelsea, and some to Bloomsbury, and some on every train and every boat for somewhere, but always they returned to Paris, to listen to the latest innovation in literature or dressmaking, painting as well as foods” (*Collected Poems* 246). Here, Barnes articulates a way of life but she also targets the importance of innovation—in *all* types of expression—for the expatriate community. Paris served as the constant hub of a larger, free-floating, European lifestyle and part of this lifestyle of innovation was breaking with and acting out against societal norms—sexuality included. In *Women of the Left Bank*, Shari Benstock notes that, “[f]or homosexual women, the reasons for living abroad, the circle of friends developed there, and the integration of personal and professional lives were often influenced by sexual choices” (10). These same choices that Barnes made—integrating into a Sapphic literary salon, engaging in openly homosocial or homosexual relationships—would have been more controversial, even illegal in the United States. In many ways, expatriate Paris was a world carved out of one society (Paris) and containing elements of the various home countries. It served Barnes as a hybrid world of much greater worth than a place on a map. Paris was a strategy of existing.

As literary innovation was an enormous part of the modernist movement, and was the essence of Paris for Barnes, looking first at her style of writing in *Nightwood* offers us a window into the larger issues of the text’s content. Whereas writers like Gertrude Stein integrated

literary innovation a process of decontextualizing and merging their writing styles with different types of media, Barnes integrates her innovation with words on a societal level. This notion can be most closely related to Bonnie Kime Scott's theory of webbing. In *Refiguring Modernism*, Scott relates the literary innovation of modernist women writers such as Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West, and Djuna Barnes to a spider's web. According to Scott, "the spider is more concerned with her own design.... Her actions of repeatedly attaching, launching out into the unknown, and landing for the next anchoring point suggest polyvalence, polyphony, independence, and the inclination and ability to make selective use of existing structures or to seek new ones—not all of them manmade" (xxix). That this written web is spun between both natural elements and manmade elements is particularly relevant as it mimics hybridity by crossing and decontextualizing the border between nature and culture. Rather than building from what Scott refers to as scaffolding, as she claims men often did, women writers such as Barnes gained agency through their writing by appropriating all elements at their disposal regardless of their origin. For Scott, this strategy allows for the "possibility of agency and selection for the weaver within the structures of cultural and physical demands" (xx). Essentially, Barnes was finding new and different ways to gain access to and create agency within the world at large. Scott notes, however, that "the completeness of the textual web [is] an illusion" (xx). If this webbing strategy is designed to create a text as a closed, self-sustaining system, it is necessarily flawed as a result of the attachments to predominant cultural systems that were necessary to bring it into existence. This complication, when translated from a strategy of writing to the content of that writing and then, finally, to the larger expatriate community that served as that content's model, adds a flaw to the consideration of hybrid societies and existences. Translating this theory of Barnes's writing to *Nightwood* offers an illuminating

glimpse into Barnes's planning and execution of her hybrid world. As we will see, the characters of *Nightwood* feel the burden of the web despite, or rather because of the novelty of their hybrid world.

Evidence that Barnes did engage both with the boundary between the natural and manmade⁶ worlds and with society and its issues can be traced through her early works. Phillip Herring spends a substantial amount of time documenting the nature of Barnes's early career in *Djuna: The Life and Work of Djuna Barnes*. When Barnes was a reporter for *McCall's* magazine, her editor, Burton Rascoe, paid well for articles that ignored issues of women's suffrage or culture at large, focusing instead on soap operas and housekeeping tips (130).⁷ Despite these challenges, Barnes still managed to engage with political issues relating to women. In "How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed," a nonfiction piece published in 1914, Barnes takes on the force feeding, what she calls "the days phenomena," imposed on jailed suffragettes who had taken to hunger strikes. Throughout the article, Barnes must remind herself time and again that this is an experiment, that "I shall be strictly professional.... If it be an ordeal, it is familiar to my sex at this time; other women have suffered it in acute reality." Near the end of the article comes the realization:

I saw in my hysteria a vision of a hundred women in grim prison hospitals, bound and shrouded on tables just like this, held in the rough grip of callous warders while white-robed doctors thrust rubber tubing into the delicate interstices of their nostrils and forced

⁷ In "The Outsider among the Expatriates: Djuna Barnes' Satire on the Ladies of the *Almanack*," Karla Jay expands upon Barnes's financial situation that kept her a pawn in the system of supply and demand: "Unlike most of the other women, Barnes had to work for a living and had little enough to get by on comfortably, since she lacked the fortune of Natalie Barney or Peggy Guggenheim or even the relative security of Gertrude Stein or Romaine Brooks. If others wrote or painted, it was because they *chose* to: Barnes *had* to" (184).

into their helpless bodies the crude fuel to sustain the life they longed to sacrifice.

Science had, then, deprived us of the right to die.

Here Barnes poses the female body as an element to be sacrificed for the cause of women's suffrage. Their death is their only natural element of control and, as Barnes articulates, science, man's intervention has stripped even that from their control. Women have been robbed of their natural-given power over the function of their bodies and over their bodies as natural elements of protest and persuasion. This realization, that science, the tools of man, have interrupted the natural rhythms of the world, is a theme that carries through in others of her earlier works.

In her collection of poems entitled *The Book of Repulsive Women*, written in Greenwich Village and published before Barnes's expatriation, Barnes conjures similar images of oppression and interruption. "From Third Avenue On" shows the effects of men appropriating women. "And now she walks on out turned feet / Beside the litter in the street / Or rolls beneath a dirty sheet / Within the town. / She does not stir to doff her dress, / She does not kneel low to confess, / A little conscience, no distress / And settles down. / Ah God! She settles down we say; / It means her powers slip away / It means she draws back day by day / From good or bad" (15). The "she" of the poem here enters into an agreement—marriage or prostitution perhaps, or perhaps the implicit agreement of being a woman in society—that is characterized by the filth of the setting in which it lives. Entering into this arrangement in this degraded setting brings on the diminishment of women's powers that are, when contrasted with the man-made surrounding, inborn elements or instincts of the natural world. The remainder of the poem further characterizes individual situations until it rejoins the collective group of women in the final stanza: "Those living dead up in their rooms / Must note how partial are the tombs, / That take men back into the wombs / While theirs must fast. / And those who have their blooms in jars /

No longer stare into the stars, / Instead, they watch the dinky cars— / And live aghast” (16). The deed here is done, the natural powers are gone, women, now the living dead, have been appropriated by men, their natural gifts, their wombs given over to the sustenance of the opposite sex. We also see women who have given over to the machinations of society in a more cosmetic light. Women who no longer look to the natural world, to the stars, now steep themselves in artifice, in makeup jars that simulate natural youth and beauty. Like Anzaldúa’s border fence unnaturally dissecting the landscape, Barnes gives us the theme of interruption in the natural world.

This theme of male interruption carries through to *Nightwood*, written during her expatriation. In doing so, *Nightwood* shows us Barnes’s construction of Paris as a lifestyle and as a strategy for existence. In the text, she writes of a world where breaking normative boundaries is commonplace. Among the cast of characters we find the blurring of sexual practices in the lesbian relationship between Robin Vote and Nora Flood. We see the blurring of religious boundaries in the relationship between Felix and Robin. We also see an openly gay transvestite in the character of Dr. Matthew O’Connor. The entire cast of characters embodies a blurring of social boundaries. There are, indeed, even characters that blur the physical boundaries as well. The characterization of the Duchess of Broadback, while lengthy, provides an illuminating example of the work this hybrid characterization does to construct Barnes’s expatriate world:

Her trade—the trapeze—seemed to have preserved her. ... Her legs had the specialized tension common to aerial workers; something of the bar was in her wrists... In her face was the tense expression of an organism surviving in an alien element. She seemed to have a skin that was the pattern of her costume: a bodice of lozenges, red and yellow,

low in the back and ruffled over and under the arms...one somehow felt that they ran through her as the design runs through hard holiday candies....The stuff of the tights was no longer a covering, it was herself; the span of the tightly stitched crotch was so much her own flesh that she was as unsexed as a doll. The needle that had made one the property of the child made the other the property of no man. 12-3

Here we see a character who is effectively genderless—there is no gap between her body, how it is used in a profession, and how that package is seen in the larger societal context.

The character of Nikka and his swatch of intricate tattoos serves a similar purpose. “[O]ver his belly was an angel from Chartres; on each buttock, half public, half private, a quotation from the book of magic, a confirmation of the Jansenist theory.... Across his chest, beneath a beautiful caravel in full sail, two clasped hands, the wrist bones fretted with point lace...” (16). Laura Winkiel, in “Circuses and Spectacles: Public Culture in *Nightwood*,” provides a reading of these various elements: “The stereotypical black man contains multiple layers of meaning which derive from many historical sites and social positions. Nikka’s tattoos combine pre-modern African culture with Western culture’s myths about Africans so as to create a contradictory, hybrid subject” (21). Here, according to Winkiel, Nikka’s characterization appropriates the past in the form of ironic tattooing thereby declaring himself, in a way similar to the Duchess of Broadback, a part of no hierarchical, boundaried system. These early characterizations serve as functions of destruction or destabilization within the text by breaking down the borders between individual action, identity, and society, making room for new ways of meaning and being to flourish in their wake. Barnes has created, then, a world where, at its foundation, society is no longer capable of placing boundaries between subjects, where society is no longer capable of dividing whole, complete existences into yes and no, right and wrong.

The situation is, however, more complex than an individual free-for-all. Amidst this seemingly liberating hybrid society, Barnes weaves in what she sees as the inevitable result of such boundary blurring. The rules of a hegemonic, normative society are embedded in the text. Unless a complete break with the home society can be made, the creation of a hybrid society—in reality or in fiction—will be ultimately unsuccessful. Nancy Bombaci explores what might be considered a parallel limit in *Freaks in Late Modernist Culture*. In her chapter on *Nightwood*, Bombaci traces what she terms the “limits of self-fashioning” (65) through various characterizations in the text. According to Bombaci, “[t]hroughout her oeuvre, Djuna Barnes remained fascinated with the notion that identity is malleable and performative rather than innate and fixed” (65). Despite the characters’ desires to control their identity by manipulating subjectivity and objectivity, Bombaci argues, “heredity continues to exert its force on identity” (65) with the end result of characters being held back by an invisible, intangible force.

Bombaci’s reading of the text offers parallel insight into the limits of societal transformation allowing the book, despite its seeming praise of hybrid existences, to serve as a critique of society as a whole and, possibly, of Paris as it was for Barnes. We can start to envision this larger, societal critique in “Watchman, What of the Night?” In what becomes a metaphor for the book as a whole, Dr. O’Connor relates the experience of night and day to societal custom: “The night and the day are two travels, and the French—gut-greedy and fist-tight though they often are—alone leave testimony of the two in the dawn; we tear up the one for the sake of the other; not so the French” (82). Here, we begin to get a picture of nature and natural boundaries. There is night, and there is day, and in-between there is the natural boundary of twilight. The difference in the two societies is in how this natural boundary is traversed. The French handle it with ease while the Americans, in essence, superimpose a man-made, societal

boundary that only mimics that of the natural. That new boundary creates fear and apprehension as the American “separates the two for fear of indignities, so that the mystery is cut in every cord” (85). The imagery of a severed cord highlights this boundary erected in-between night and day, cutting the ease of the flow from one to the other.

This man-made boundary also creates long-lasting effects in behavior, literally separating man from his natural, bestial influences:

The French have made a detour of filthiness—Oh, the good dirt! Whereas you are of a clean race, of a too eagerly washing people, and this leaves no road for you. The brawl of the Beast leaves a path for the Beast. You wash your brawl with every thought, with every gesture, with every conceivable emollient and *savon*, and expect to find your way again. A Frenchman makes a navigable hour with a tuft of hair, a wrenched *bretelle*, a rumpled bed. The tear of wine is still in his cup to catch back the quantity of its bereavement; his *cantiques* straddle two backs, night and day.” (84)

This treatment of night and day is a critique of society. The French have not imposed a man-made boundary and, thus, have not severed the relationship between what is natural and what is constructed by society. Ahmed Nimeiri makes a similar claim: Doctor O’Connor “argues that unlike Europe, America banishes from its life some of the essential aspects of experience and consciousness because it cannot tolerate them” (102). The constructed separation of night and day and the effects it causes delineate, for Barnes, what happens when society imposes limits on what is accepted and what is not accepted. According to Nimeiri, “this contrast is an index to both Robin’s character and the novel” (102).

This passage is perhaps the most obvious choice in categorizing the work as a societal critique but, in truth, Barnes laces in societal critiques from the foundation onward. In the

introduction to the novel, T.S. Eliot speaks of the opening passage: “[w]hen I first read the book I found the opening movement rather slow and dragging, until the appearance of the doctor” (xxii). This passage, which traces the family history of Guido, Hedvig, and Felix Volkbein, often loses the favor of the readers when compared to the dramatic personages of Robin, Nora, and the Doctor. Even Nimeiri regards this opening movement as merely a setup for the wedding between Felix and Robin as the main plot device. It is, in fact, much more—it can be seen, using Nimeiri’s phrasing, as another “index” to the novel. This index frames the text from the standpoint of societal oppression and its effects.

In the characterization of Guido, Felix’s father, we are given long stretches of his history. During one of these scenes, we see Guido crossing a square gripping a yellow and black handkerchief that, Barnes tells us, “cried aloud the ordinance of 1468, issued by one Pietro Barbo” (2). This handkerchief clutched by Guido recalls a historic event when Pope Paul II⁸ demanded that:

with a rope about its neck, Guido’s race should run in the Corso for the amusement of the Christian populace, while ladies of noble birth, sitting upon spines too refined for rest, arose from their seats, and, with the red-gowned cardinals and the *monsignori*, applauded with that cold yet hysterical abandon of a people that is at once unjust and happy, the very Pope himself shaken down from his hold on heaven with the laughter of a man who forgoes his angels that he may recapture the beast. (2)

Guido, carrying a reminder of oppressive law four hundred years in the past, gives the reader the first taste of the text’s foundations in societal oppression. In so framing the text, we also begin to

⁸ My reading of this passage, including the history surrounding it, comes from Laura Trubowitz’s article “In Search of ‘The Jew’ in Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood*: Jewishness, Antisemitism, Structure, and Style.”

see the effects of hegemonic society drawn into hybrid worlds. Guido himself tries to create a hybrid world where he can live in peace. “Guido had lived as all Jews do, who, cut off from their people by accident or choice, find that they must inhabit a world whose constituents, being alien, force the mind to succumb to an imaginary populace. ... In life he had done everything to span the impossible gap” (3). Guido’s hybrid world is grafted almost completely from a make-believe past and yet, as his handkerchief reminds us, his attempts are unsuccessful. No matter how much he strives, he cannot escape his race’s history of societal oppression. As a result of his history, Guido, and subsequently his son, must constantly “Bow Down” to the rest of the world in an effort to come to span “the impossible gap.” Guido’s individual malady can be analyzed in more detail but first, it is necessary to briefly regard the effects of this societal interruption for the main characters in the text.

The Doctor is, effectively, a woman trapped in a man’s body. When Nora discovers him in his apartment during the early morning hours, she finds his chamber to be “a cross between a *chamber à coucher* and a boxer’s training camp” (79). Lying in his bed, his head “with its over-large black eyes, its full gun-metal cheeks and chin, was framed in the golden semi-circle of a wig with long pendent curls that touched his shoulders, and falling back against the pillow, turned up the shadowy interior of their cylinders. He was heavily roughed and his lashes painted” (79). We find, then, the doctor performing drag. The Doctor’s performative behavior, prefiguring, in a way, Judith Butler’s reading of gender play, is not, however, a lifestyle but rather a performance for himself—and whatever male partner might arrive—in the private confines of his room. Later, we discover the internal conflict as he recounts a trip to a church. “‘I have tried to seek, and I only find.’ I said, ‘It is I, my Lord, who know there’s beauty in any permanent mistake like me. Haven’t I said it so? But,’ I says, ‘I’m not able to stay permanent

unless you help me, O Book of Concealment!” (132). The Doctor, split between what his natural instincts tell him he *should* be and where he finds himself in the world, is praying for a moment of divine intervention, for the Lord to reach down and intervene thereby removing the doctor’s suffering.

Nora’s plight might be described as that of a typical woman in society—overworked for the sake of others. Her lifestyle—she is naturally drawn to Robin—ignores societal regulations of sexual practice, but this reaching beyond the boundaries of hegemonic, limited society doesn’t reach a point of happiness. “Nora had the face of all people who love the people—a face that would be evil when she found out that to love without criticism is to be betrayed. Nora robbed herself for everyone; incapable of giving herself warning, she was continually turning about to find herself diminished” (51). She is naïve when we first meet her, too trusting of the world and the people in it. If she cannot escape the demands people and society place on her, she will diminish into nothingness.

Robin faces perhaps the most telling crisis for this study—the battle between the natural, animalistic self and society’s restraints. Her characterization continuously points out her natural qualities. Where she first appears in the text, “[t]he perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the odour [sic] of oil of amber.... About her head there was an effulgence as of phosphorus glowing about the circumference of a body of water.... Like a painting by the *douanier* Rousseau, she seemed to lie in a jungle trapped in a drawing room” (34-5). These word pictures of a woman captured during sleep, when she is most *uninterrupted*, point to a being firmly rooted in the natural world. She is of the earth, but trapped in a constructed chamber, out of place. Later, when Robin becomes involved with Nora, “she kept repeating in one way or another her

wish for a home, as if she were afraid she would be lost again, as if she were aware, without conscious knowledge, that she belonged to Nora, and that if Nora did not make it permanent by her own strength, she would forget” (55). Here, the language is an ominous premonition of Robin’s descent into doggish existence. Robin, like a dog following its owner, is not conscious of the bond between them. It is only her instincts that tell her she belongs to Nora, and like a dog trainer, Nora must reinforce those instincts or Robin will, once again, become a wandering mutt. Throughout the text, whether it be the rainforest trapped in a sitting room or a dog attempting to be human, Robin represents the entity that is out of place.

All three of these characterizations provide an intimate look at the effects of societal intervention in the natural rhythms of the world. Without Barnes’s construction of a hybrid world in the text, these characters, conflicted as they are, wouldn’t have any place in which to exist. Their existence, however, is blighted by the larger, hegemonic society seeping under the edges of their separate world.

The lengthy setup of Guido’s history in chapter one also leads us to one of the major devices used in the text to delineate this constant battle between natural and societal instincts. Guido, Felix’s father, can, for Barnes, sum up his entire identity in one metaphor: “[t]his memory and the handkerchief that accompanied it had wrought in Guido (as certain flowers brought to a pitch of florid ecstasy no sooner attain their specific type than they fall into its decay) the sum total of what is the Jew” (2). The imagery of the flower represents a juxtaposition through which we can see the boundary between natural and societal instincts. The flower, a natural element attaining its “florid ecstasy” is Guido in his prime as a man who knows and understands his heritage. The moment he reaches this prime is the moment he recognizes that his heritage is a negative entity for society and thus he immediately begins to decay. In-

between this ecstasy and decay, there is the moment when natural instincts—happiness or pride in one’s heritage—collide with societal instincts—fear or hatred of one’s heritage. During the collision we can see the boundary that it sets up. It is this boundary that shapes the limits of a hybrid society.

These torn instincts continue throughout the text along a line of natural and man-made, helping us analyze the complicated relationship between Barnes and expatriation. In the final paragraph of the text, Robin devolves out of the man-made sphere back to beast:

Then she began to bark also, crawling after [the dog]—barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching. The dog began to cry then, running with her, head-on with her head, as if to circumvent her; soft and slow his feet went padding. He ran this way and that, low down in his throat crying, and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head, until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees. (170)

The lines “obscene and touching” delineate the boundary. Seen from one angle, from the perspective of man-made society, Robin’s barking is obscene, unnatural, and unnerving. Seen from the other perspective, from the perspective of the natural world, Robin’s barking is touching, the sign of a return to her roots, to her natural graces. In the end, they collapse together, spent by their efforts—one of rejoining nature, the other of welcoming her return. This boundary space between the juxtaposition of obscene and touching represents Robin’s inability to survive across the boundary of nature and society. The man-made boundaries that she attempted to shun as an expatriate, as a woman throwing off the pretenses of what would become Adrienne Rich’s “compulsory heterosexuality,” have relentlessly encircled her until she must

devolve into one camp or another. That Robin devolved into the natural, animalistic world perhaps speaks of Barnes's dedication to liberating progressivism and her hope that the work of hybridity would continue.

Dr. Matthew O'Connor, during his lecture with Nora, notes that "no man can find a greater truth than his kidney will allow" (84). This quote helps explain the endings for Barnes's characters. According to the Doctor, one can only search or push for the ultimate truth so far before over taxing physical limits. The Doctor, after endlessly reasoning with himself and the world throughout the text, finally hits a wall, and drinks himself to collapse or death. His end epitomizes the end for all of the characters of *Nightwood*. The struggle against a societal system, coordinated with the construction of a new hybridized world that is nevertheless inherently flawed, ends with demise. If, as a way of existing, Barnes constructed her works from the framework of hybridity—pulling elements from both France, and the United States, from things man-made, and things existing in nature, then she did so to an end that was negative for her characters in *Nightwood*. By webbing a world whose new form of existence was culled from here and there, hither and yon, she inevitably pulls in elements of the patriarchy. Hence the characters' struggles with divided selves despite their existence in a system that seems, at first glance, to be more liberated and innovative. For Barnes, the limiting borders, the interruptions from a man-made society, never fully go away. Through the efforts of her characters and the lifestyles they lead, the borders are pushed away but the effects of patriarchy still seep in around the edges. They drown the doctor in endless waves of necessary analysis and explanation. They flood Nora and Robin's shared apartment. They drive the characters of this hybrid society to madness, ruin, and death. On a meta level, then, the problem of interruption is essentially repeated. The characters of Robin, Nora, and the Doctor are faced, within the hybrid society,

with the same problems they would have faced had they never left for Paris. They are ultimately left with a new version of the same decision—do I integrate with society as it wants me to be, or do I struggle to maintain myself and / in the hybrid, natural-based world? As Nimeiri says, albeit for different reasons, “the questing American discovers that he is as constricted in Europe as he has been in America” (104). As Barnes writes it, *Nightwood* is representative of the failed American experiment of expatriation. In the words of the Doctor: “Now ... the end—mark my words—now *nothing, but wrath and weeping!*” (166). The Doctor’s line here is telling both for the future of his fellow expatriates, for Barnes, and for Barnes’s dim prediction for difference in the world at large. To revisit Barnes’s line in her memoir notes, Barnes tells us that “[t]he terrifying part of it is that it is done. Not what we did, but that it is over” (*Collected Poems* 247). For Barnes, the work of expatriation and the subsequent construction of a hybrid world was left unfinished. Perhaps, as Barnes’s memoirs suggest, there was hope to be found in sustaining the hybrid experiment, in continuously fending off the interventions of society. For Barnes, however, the ultimate societal intervention would arrive in the form of the Second World War that forced her out of Paris and, eventually, out of Europe, out of society, and out of writing.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

It will forever be impossible to definitively say that Gertrude Stein and Djuna Barnes were theorizing border crossing, gender play, and lesbian existences decades before Anzaldúa, Rich, and Butler came along. It is similarly difficult to declare that Stein and Barnes laid definitive groundwork that Anzaldúa, Rich, and Butler knowingly picked up on when later recording their theories. In hindsight, however, the evidence of hybridity in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Nightwood* is apparent.

Stein creates a hybrid world before our eyes. By appropriating and blurring the concept of autobiography, she is able to play with, skew, and eventually tear down the systems of gender and normalized sexuality. The result is a functioning existence where borders and their classifications are no longer valid. Barnes frankly portrays a strange and fantastic world uninhibited, if only for a brief moment, by society's harsh boundaries. Her world's downfall mimics the symbol of the doll in Nora and Robin's relationship—sterility. As a hybrid construct, Barnes's world is not capable of sustaining itself against the tides of society and thusly collapses in upon itself.

Reading these texts from a hybrid standpoint not only provides new ways of understanding literary history, it also provides us new tools to approach our future, literary or otherwise. Revolutionary as Anzaldúa, Rich, and Butler were and are, their work is not nearly as new as we might think—pieces of it were already being lived and written in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Hybrid societies are not a new concept. Their importance is shown by their presences, successes, and failures in Stein's *Autobiography* and Barnes's *Nightwood*. From this standpoint, these texts reiterate the necessity of whole, undivided people and, most importantly, of a sustained society that promotes this fluidity.

These two works stand as the remnants of the expatriate community in Paris—a historical hybrid society positioned at the border, overlapping Paris and the United States. As testaments of this world, these works show us what is left behind—failures and successes—of the great American expatriate experiment. They become, then, part of the lived human experience of oppression as well as the lived human experience of fighting oppression. In the *Autobiography*, Stein doesn't approach the negatives of the world outside the expatriate community—even her romp through England during the Great War is handled with exuberance and energy. Perhaps Barnes is more realistic, then, about the fate of societies that are cobbled together from hither and yon. In the end, expatriate Paris did falter. The energy of the experiment petered out and the worlds lived and created or re-created in their texts disappeared behind the shadow of war and sociopolitical change. As testaments to the expatriate experiment, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Nightwood* represent not only the last holdout, but also, perhaps, the secret to circumventing the inherent sterile nature of hybridity.

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